

CONTROL

'I have been having Reichian therapy for almost a year and this is my first attempt to write down some of my feelings and thoughts about my experience so far. To date most of what I have written has been in an academic environment, based largely on the prior digestion of other people's ideas and within a framework dictated by someone else; in short, I am used to writing in a *controlled* environment. So that, I find myself both excited and scared at the prospect of being able to write something about myself, with all the possibilities and limitations which that implies'.

In this article I am not setting out to prove anything or to offer the fruits of any research for approval, but rather to examine for myself whether I can coherently express a realisation perhaps commonplace to many people, which has occurred in the course of my therapy so far.

The day that I first realised that control was one of my biggest enemies was an important one. Firstly it came to me in a flash without any prompting from outside and secondly, it came directly from my body, without any prior intellectual manoeuvrings. I was confined to bed, suffering from acute menstrual contractions, extreme changes in temperature and profuse sweating which left me cold and shivering. If I so much as stood upright, I lost balance and focus. I became very panicky, but with the help of a sympathetic friend I managed to relax a bit, to 'breathe into' and 'go with' the contractions, floating rather than resisting. However I did finally succumb to an aspirin.

As I lay more calmly, clutching a hot water bottle, my mind wandered over the events of the last week. It had been a week of worry and tension and I had been rushing around and pushing myself hard to get things done. At that point the thought suddenly hit me - *'I don't have to hold on so tight to survive.'* I realised that I was experiencing a very crude, firm 'NO' from my body. *'I will not be treated like this. You must live by my laws or suffer'* was the message. Obvious? I guess it is, but it took four hours or so of agony for me to take any notice.

Later on I consulted a book on obstetrics and gynaecology out of interest, and found that my condition went under the flamboyant title of spasmodic dysmenorrhoea. Perfectly usual, according to the experts; not the result of any obvious organic abnormality, cured by aspirin. This I firmly dispute. Are we honestly expected to accept a condition of pain and acute tension as the normal condition for the human body? Is health not the truly normal state and does this not indicate the ability to function in a fluid manner, free from persistent tension? Similar days of pain and inertia, with complete lack of incentive to do anything, have followed since the day I described and I have begun to realise several of the ways in which I exercise control over myself and the environment.

One of the most significant things about control is its link with dishonesty. When I am in control I have ceased to be open and accessible and am imposing a false rigidity on myself; or I am attempting to limit other people or situations in which I find myself. This dishonesty springs from self-distrust - a fear of my inadequacy to cope as I am. A fear that I won't know the rules of a situation. What this inevitably leads to is boredom and frustration because I tend to allow myself to experience only things which fit in with my pre-conceived self-image - my supposed capacity to deal with the unexpected. But there is another danger implicit here - namely to force myself into doing something which looks like being a trial-by-fire situation, becomes only another way to gain control. So I am somewhat caught between the Scylla of fear and the Charybdis of panic if I nudge myself too fast.

But how does this control operate? It works for me in a variety of insidious ways. Words being the most dangerous. I was brought up in a household which revolved round the theatre and great homage was paid to the spoken word - often to its sound and magnitude, rather than to its relevance or truth! It is all too easy for me to talk my way into or out of believing something, without paying the slightest attention to the tautness of my diaphragm or the pains in my neck which tell me all too plainly that I am lying! Words are an excellent way to avoid feeling the vibrations of a situation and expressing those feelings appropriately. Along with that goes the *sound* of my voice. This particular form of control would need a separate article to explain in detail but the essential indication of a controlled voice is incongruity - the voice does not match the content of the conversation. Nor does it agree with other physical expressions such as that of the eyes. This vocal technique is a means of holding back on pressing feelings which I am afraid of expressing at the moment. It is a technique of *distraction* - aimed at distracting the other person from what is happening and putting off a painful experience until later. Or so I tell myself, but of course that's a lie because usually whatever was bugging me gets neatly buried and I leave the person to whom I was talking without ever really meeting them.

Another favourite distraction which I use to prevent myself from living fully in the present is food. A piece of bread and butter serves as a distraction and as a symbol of nourishment, filling my stomach but not my soul.

As I write I am realising that all these control mechanisms are geared to wriggling out of an experience of present time; and this is particularly true of my more abstract and cerebral machinations. Especially the concoction of plans and fantasies which are always placed in future time. I either build up expectations about a situation I have arranged for the near future - that one usually leads to disappointment and frustration; or I manufacture a complicated plan about a future lifestyle - a training course I want to take, a community I want to start, etc. These plans are usually accomplished with myself in a central position of authority, and therefore in control. They are reminiscent of when I was a drama student and I was 'blocking' a scene for the theatre (deciding on the relative movements and positions of actors within the set). When it came to the actuality of rehearsal I would discover that I had made little or no allowance for the unpredictability of actors or the volume which they occupy in space.

These abstract fantasies are always connected to a fear of being swamped by other people's ideas which I usually anticipate as being disruptive and the plans are always conceived of as a *fait accompli*, without any attention to the possibility of progression, development or change.

So far I have been very much concerned with the negative side of my experience. At times it can be a rather depressing prospect when I contemplate the number of ways in which I hold myself in check in an attempt to be right and acceptable in my responses or to avoid disappointment by facing reality. But I believe, although I am wary of being too vehement in my statement of this, that things are slowly changing and that there is much pleasure to be derived from letting go sometimes. The key to doing this lies in living in the here and now although that is too general a statement to have much meaning.

Some of the things which I have found to be of use, arrived at purely accidentally and without any plan or structure, are as follows: a very simple exercise suggested one day in a therapy session called 'make a plan', which consists of making a plan in detail of an action and then attempting to perform the action exactly according to plan - it's impossible! I was very surprised by how many of the details necessary to brush my hair effectively I failed to include in my meticulous plan. Simply putting on a record and dancing out the tensions or just shaking my whole body, area by area, serve both as a means of expressing pent up emotions and of reminding myself of the existence of parts of my body which I have been misusing or ignoring. Some experiments which I have tried deliberately to see how I fare are firstly - detachment: sitting back and letting things happen, watching the world go by without being obliged to react or intervene. Secondly, deliberately putting myself in situations or environments of which I am scared or which are new to me. I have been surprised how well I fare when

I follow someone else's plans for a change. Lastly, easing my hold on my image - not bothering about how I look or worrying about what I should wear but just putting on any old clothes and discovering that I still exist as the same entity despite any external decoration. This has led recently to an overhaul of my entire wardrobe and to cutting my hair to which I was very attached. I had realised that my clothes bore little relation to me now but referred back to an 'old me' and had become more of a distraction and a decoration which I was trying to emulate than an expression of the inner reality of me. The effort which I find the hardest but often the most rewarding is to decide that I will not do anything which I don't want to do. This often leads to doing nothing for which I find myself reprimanded in this society of constant and feverish activity, professing often to respect the manifestations of self-denial and 'unselfishness' irrespective of the motives or the happiness of the martyr concerned. Nevertheless I have found this terrible idleness to be a rich means of self-refreshment and sometimes of re-evaluation.

Although I have by no means solved the problem of control, I have more hope and trust than ever before in the healing power of patience and acceptance. I will finish with two helpful reminders from Thaddeus Golas' delightful and accepting book - **The Lazy Man's Guide to Enlightenment** - '*Love it the way it is*' and '*No resistance*'.